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KING STEPHEN

EDWARD FALES COWARD



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KING STEPHEN

An Historical Drama in Seven Tableaux
Completed from John Keats'
Fragment

BY

EDWARD FALES COWARD

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WILSON A. BURROWS

80 BROADWAY

NEW YORK CITY

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1912

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EDWARD FALES COWARD

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no 1

To
M. R. C.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

KING STEPHEN, son of Adela and the Count of Blois and nephew of the late King Henry I.

DE REDVERS, Earl of Baldwin	}	Followers of King Stephen
SIR RUFUS D'EVREUX		
SIR GREGORY DE COURTENAY		
GORSE, a soldier.		
SHEPHERD, a soldier		

QUEEN MAUD, wife of Stephen.

ELFRIDA, an attendant.

ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

PRINCE HENRY, son of Queen Maude and the Duke of Angiers and afterwards King Henry II.

ROBERT, Earl of Gloucester, natural son of the late King Henry I.

EARL OF CHESTER	}	Followers of Queen Maude.
DE KAIMS		
SIR ROLAND DE BURGHE		
SIR HILDEBRAND D'ARCY		
HEATHE, a soldier		

QUEEN MAUDE, better known as Matilda, daughter of the late King Henry I. Twice married, her first husband was the Emperor of Germany. On his death she married the Duke of Angiers.

SCENE—ENGLAND. TIME—1141 TO 1159.

Tableaux I, II, III.	Near Lincoln.
Tableau IV.	Hall in the Castle.
Tableau V.	The Gates of Winchester.
Tableau VI.	Outside Oxford.
Tableau VII.	Hall in the Castle

KING STEPHEN

TABLEAU I

Field of Battle, near Lincoln.

Alarum. Enter King Stephen, Knights, and Soldiers.

Step. If shame can on a soldier's vain-swoll'n front
Spread deeper crimson than the battle's toil,
Blush in your casing helmets! for see, see!
Yonder my chivalry, my pride of war,
Wrenched with an iron hand from firm array,
Are routed loose about the plashy meads,
Of honour forfeit. O that my known voice
Could reach your dastard ears, and fright you more!
Fly, cowards, fly! Gloucester is at your backs!
Throw your slack bridles o'er the flurried manes,
Ply well the rowel with faint trembling heels,
Scampering to death at last!

Sir Rufus. The enemy
Bears his flaunt standard close upon their rear.

Sir Gregory. Sure of a bloody prey, seeing the fens
Will swamp them girth-deep.

Step. Over head and ears.
No matter! 'Tis a gallant enemy;
How like a comet he goes streaming on.

But we must plague him in the flank,—hey, friends?
We are well breathed—follow!

Enter Earl Baldwin and Soldiers, as defeated.

Step. De Redvers!
What is the monstrous bugbear that can fright Baldwin?

Bald. No scarecrow, but the fortunate star
Of boisterous Chester, whose fell truncheon now
Points level to the goal of victory.
This way he comes, and if you would maintain
Your person unaffronted by vile odds,
Take horse, my Lord.

Step. And which way spur for life?
Now I thank heaven I am in the toils,
That soldiers may bear witness how my arm
Can burst the meshes. Not the eagle more
Loves to beat up against a tyrannous blast,
Than I to meet the torrent of my foes.
This is a brag—be 't so,—but if I fall,
Carve it upon my 'scutcheoned sepulchre.
On fellow soldiers! Earl of Redvers, back!
Not twenty Earls of Chester shall browbeat
The diadem. *[Exeunt. Alarum.*

TABLEAU II

Another part of the Field.

Trumpets sounding a Victory. Enter Gloucester, Knights, and Forces.

Glou. Now may we lift our bruised visors up
And take the flattering freshness of the air,
While the wild din of battle dies away
Into times past, yet to be echoed sure
In the silent pages of our chroniclers.

Sir Rol. Will Stephen's death be marked there,
my good Lord,
Or that we give him lodging in yon towers?

Glou. Fain would I know the great usurper's fate.

Enter Sir Hildebrand and Heathe severally.

Sir Hil. My Lord!

Heathe. Most noble Earl!

Sir Hil. The King——

Heathe. The Empress greets——

Glou. What of the King?

Sir Hil. He sole and lone maintains
A hopeless bustle 'mid our swarming arms,
And with a nimble savageness attacks,
Escapes, makes fiercer onset, then anew
Eludes death, giving death to most that dare

Trespass within the circuit of his sword!
He must by this have fallen. Baldwin is taken;
And for the Duke of Bretagne, like a stag
He flies, for the Welsh beagles to hunt down.
God save the Empress!

Glou. Now our dreaded Queen:
What message from her Highness?

Heathe. Royal Maude
From the thronged towers of Lincoln hath looked
down,
Like Pallas from the walls of Ilion,
And seen her enemies havocked at her feet.
She greets most noble Gloucester from her heart,
Entreating him, his captains, and brave knights,
To grace a banquet. The high city gates
Are envious which shall see your triumph pass;
The streets are full of music.

Enter De Kaims.

Glou. Whence come you?

De K. From Stephen, my good Prince——
Stephen! Stephen!

Glou. Why do you make such echoing of his name?

De K. Because I think, my Lord, he is no man,
But a fierce demon, 'nointed safe from wounds,
And misbaptizèd with a Christian name,

Glou. A mighty soldier!—Does he still hold out?

De K. He shames our victory. His valor still
Keeps elbow-room amid our eager swords,

King Stephen

TABLEAU II

And holds our bladed falchions all aloof.
His gleaming battle-axe, being slaughter-sick,
Smote on the morion of a Flemish knight,
Broke short in his hand; upon the which he flung
The heft away with such a vengeful force
It paunched the Earl of Chester's horse, who then
Spleen-hearted came in full career at him.

Glou. Did no one take him at a vantage then?

De K. Three then with tiger leap upon him flew,
Whom with his sword, swift drawn and nimbly
held.

He stung away again, and stood to breathe,
Smiling. Anon upon him rushed once more
A throng of foes, and in this renewed strife,
My sword met his and snapped off at the hilt.

Glou. Come, lead me to this man—and let us move
In silence, not insulting his sad doom
With clamorous trumpets. To the Empress bear
My salutation as befits the time.

[Exeunt Gloucester and Forces.]

TABLEAU III

The Field of Battle. Enter Stephen, unarmed.

Step. Another sword! And what if I could seize
One from Bellona's gleaming armory,
Or choose the fairest of her sheaved spears!
Where are my enemies? Here, close at hand.
Here come the testy brood. O, for a sword!
I'm faint,—a biting sword! A noble sword!
A hedge-stake—or a ponderous stone to hurl
With brawny vengeance, like the laborer Cain.
Come on! Farewell my kingdom, and all hail
Thou superb, plumed, and helmeted renown!
All hail! I would not truck this brilliant day
To rule in Pylos with a Nestor's beard—
Come on!

Enter De Kaims and Knights.

De K. Is 't madness, or a hunger after death,
That makes thee thus unarmed throw taunts at us?
Yield, Stephen, or my sword's point dips in
The gloomy current of a traitor's heart.

Step. Do it, De Kaims, I will not budge an inch.

De K. Yes, of thy madness thou shalt take the meed.

Step. Darest thou?

De K. How, dare, against a man disarmed?

King Stephen

TABLEAU III

Step. What weapons has the lion but himself?
Come not near me, De Kaims, for by the price
Of all the glory I have won this day,
Being a king, I will not yield alive
To any but the second man of the realm,
Robert of Gloucester.

De K. Thou shalt vail to me.

Step. Shall I, when I have sworn against it, sir?
Thou whis't it brave to take a breathing king,
That, on a court-day bowed to haughty Maude,
The awed presence-chamber may be bold
To whisper, There's the man who took alive
Stephen—me—prisoner. Certes, De Kaims,
The ambition is a noble one.

De K. 'Tis true.
And, Stephen, I must compass it.

Step. No, no,
Do not tempt me to throttle you on the gorge,
Or with my gauntlet crush your hollow breast,
Just when your knighthood is grown ripe and full
For lordship.

Heathe. Is an honest yeoman's spear
Of no use at a heed? Take that.
[*Stabs Stephen with his spear.*]

Step. Ah, dastard!

De K. What, you are vulnerable! my prisoner!

Step. No, not yet. I disclaim it, and demand
Death as a sovereign right unto a king
Who 'sdains to yield to any but his peer,

TABLEAU III

King Stephen

If not in title, yet in noble deeds,
The Earl of Gloucester. Stab to the hilt, De Kaims,
For I will never by mean hands be led
From this so famous field. Do you hear! Be
quick!

[*Stephen swoons. Trumpets. Enter the Earl of Chester
and Knights.*]

TABLEAU IV

*Hall in the Castle.**Duke of Gloucester and Earl of Chester seated.*

Glou. With what imperfect ease success doth sit
On Maude's triumphant but deep frowning brow.
Ungrateful she of power, that made her Queen.
Her arrogance bites hard and leaves a sting.
Vain glory puffed she 'vers 'twas England's sense
The crown should fit her head; now idly spurns
And cribs she souls who lifted up her hands.
Too hard she bears on those who once were foes.
These parlous times will never 'fect a cure
Unless the balm of sympathetic grace
Shall act as unguent to internal wounds.
Friends Stephen has, and many, too. They'll suffer
not
This sternly woman, as she now intends,
To publicly affront and wound him more.
Patience hath bounds which e'en a woman may
Not safely brook.

Ches. You urge too much I vow
On side of gentleness and hoped for calm.
I hold her right in what she doth affect:
To her brave father, Henry, he of glorious
Fame, did Stephen swear to always draw his sword,
If needed by her it should ever be.
And, small indeed was this, you must admit,

When one remembers all the good King did
In 'stowing honors, favors, wealth and lands
Upon his sister's son, who grateless proved.

Glou. The point escapes you when you argue thus;
'Twas as the widow of the German Emp'ror:
He took the oath to see her firmly throned.
Full well as I, thou knowest that from his bond
Absolved was he when Angiers took her bride.
The flower of England chose him for their head,
Nor would they be denied, that gallant band,
And by their prowess came he to the throne.
Why, e'en the Pope gave sanction to his claim
And by decree declared the crown was his.

Ches. If thou wert paid to plead in his behalf
Thou couldst not offer up a stronger brief.

Glou. The worthy cause I urge demands no pay.
Justice alone moves me in what I do.
Though half this blood of mine is of that strain
That also feeds the heart of 'perious Maude
I cannot stomach all her cruel whims.
Whate'er my faults, I praise kind God above
My mother gave me thoughts of gentler kind
Than those which stir the breast of this our Queen.
It shakes my soul to see her so forget
The chivalry he showed when at Arundel
Fast within his clutch he had her safe entrapped.
Should she I say now on his helpless head
Her captive by the changing face of war
Vent insults base and inj'ries of this kind?

Ches. By Heaven! Thy speech is fraught with trait'-
rous ring.

Glou. No traitor I. The right to open speech
I carved out with my sword. The eminence
That now is hers was dearly bought by vigor
Of this hand.

Ches. Nay, hold thy peace! The trumpets mark the
Queen's approach.

Enter Queen Maude and retinue.

Maude. Gloucester, I will behold that Boulogne:
Set him before me. Not for the poor sake
Of regal pomp and a vainglorious hour,
As thou with wary speech, yet near enough,
Hast hinted.

Glou. Faithful counsel have I given;
If wary for your Highness' benefit.

Maude. The heavens forbid that I should not think so,
For by thy valor have I won this realm
Which by thy wisdom I will ever keep.
To sage advisers let me ever bend
A meek attentive ear, so that they treat
Of the wide kingdom's rule and government,
Not trenching on our actions personal.
Advised, not schooled, I would be; and henceforth
Spoken to in clear, plain, and open terms,
Not sideways sermoned at.

Glou. Then, in plain terms,
Once more for the fallen King—

Maude. Your pardon, brother,
I would no more of that; for, as I said,

'Tis not for worldly pomp I wish to see
The rebel, but as dooming judge to give
A sentence something worthy of his guilt.

Glou. If 't must be so, I'll bring him to your presence.
[*Exit Gloucester.*]

Maude. A meaner summoner might do as well.
My Lord of Chester, is 't true what I hear
Of Stephen of Boulogne, our prisoner,
That he, as a fit penance for his crimes,
Eats wholesome, sweet, and palatable food
Off Gloucester's golden dishes—drinks pure wine,
Lodges soft?

Ches. More than that, my gracious Queen,
Has angered me. The noble Earl, methinks,
Full soldier as he is, and without peer
In counsel, dreams too much among his books.
It may read well, but sure 'tis out of date
To play the Alexander with Darius.

Maude. Truth! I think so. By Heavens, it shall not
last!

Ches. It would amaze your Highness now to mark
How Gloucester overstrains his courtesy
To that crime-loving rebel, that Boulogne—

Maude. That ingrate!

Ches. For whose vast ingratitude
To our late sovereign lord, your noble sire,
The generous Earl condoles in his mishaps,
And with a sort of lackeying friendliness
Talks off the mighty frowning from his brow,

Woos him to hold a duet in a smile,
Or, if it pleases him, play an hour at chess—

Maude. A perjured slave!

Ches. And for his perjury,
Gloucester has fit rewards—nay, I believe,
He sets his bustling household's wits at work
For flatteries to ease this Stephen's hours,
And make a heaven of his purgatory;
Adorning bondage with the pleasant gloss
Of feats and music, and all idle shows
Of indoor pageantry; while siren whispers,
Predestined for his ear, 'scape as half-checked
From lips the courtliest and the rubiest
Of all the realm, admiring of his deeds.

Maude. A frost upon his summer!

Ches. A queen's nod can make his June December.
[*Aside.*] In Gloucester's fall, the hopes of Chester
rise.
[*Aloud.*] See they are here.

Step. You've summoned and I've come
Could I refuse your Majesty's commands?

Maude. Still insolent but yet a means we'll find
To break that haughty spirit down.

Step. The headman's axe, if I might dare suggest,
Would solve the vexèd question with dispatch.

Maude. We'll find a something better still to check
The cynic trimmings of that ribald tongue.
Death were indeed a vengeance too refined
To salve the wounds your treachery hath wrought.

No quits I'll cry till that thou bite the dust
Of bitterest despair; no joy for me, content I'll
ne'er embrace,
Till in the agony of dread remorse
Thy recr'ant soul shall writhing beg and plead
For clemency from me.

Step. When that day comes
May Heaven dart forth a flame and shrivel up
This tongue, that now frames words steeped with
The gall of bold defy.

Maude. [*Half rises.*] Strike, nobles, strike! Nay stay
My anger so flared up that my revenge
Consumed most nearly was by that same spark.

Step. Nay, let them strike. Here do I bare my heart
Which never trembled yet in danger's front.
Thinkst thou ye'll fright with tortures undevise'd?
A thousand times upon the field I've faced
The trenchant bladed sword and hacking spear.
A woman's threats I'll not compare to these.
Drag out my life or end it sharply here!
As Stephen e'er has lived so shall ye find
Will Stephen die, fearless, defiant, bold
Unto the end. Condemn or strike!

Maud of B. [Outside.] Stop! stop!

Enter Maud of Boulogne.

Sir Rol. Lady, fall back; there is no passage here.

Maud of B. My tears and grief are passport 'out the world.

Sir Rol. Halt where thou art.

Maud of B. In God's name, stay me not.

Maude. Who's she who doth intrude with vehemence
And noise so loud?

Maud of B. A woman, mighty Maude,
Like you yourself; but then so different.
With heart half broke, my gracious sovereign, see
Here at thy feet there kneels a queen, that was,
To beg you gentle mercy.

Maude. Maud of Boulogne!

Maud of B. Aye, that unhappy she, the wife of him,
The butt and target of thy fearful wrath.
Oh, turn it hence. Think, too, what thou hast lost
And with th' approving smile of Heav'n rob not
A royal sister of her precious lord.

Step. Wife of my heart, remember who thou art.
I would not for a paltry span of life
Have thee exchange the dignity of proud Boulogne.
In silence suffer as befits the crown.
'Tis not the office of a queen to sue.

Maud of B. I am no queen—an humble subject pleads
A subject's life. To his tempestuous 'plaint
Turn ye a stubborn ear. Make me his gaoler
And for a true submission to your sway
I'll yield the very essence of my heart,
Eustace, my son, as hostage to this vow.

Step. To such a pact I never will consent.

Maud of B. You must, you shall.

Step. What! Yield the hope of Blois
Into her fearsome clutch? Let this she tiger

Maul, tear and rend, devour if she will
Our helpless selves—but in that boy, our son,
God shall raise up a venging scourge to lash
This heartless monster to her doom.

Maude. Silence!

No more this jarring brawl will I endure.
My heart is flint; nor aught that thou canst rail
Or urge will strike from it the smallest spark
Of answ'ring sympathy. Ingrate, rebel,
For your usurping effort shall you pay
The sum of your offense in telling kind.
All hear ye now the will of England's queen.
'Tis my decree—nor harmless shall ye 'scape
If to the letter it's not carried out,
That this arch traitor to the Tower be
Forthwith conveyed. There in a darksome cell
With lonely silence as his only friend
Let fierce regret and deep contrition gnaw
With feverish zest his black and perjured heart.

Maud of B. [dazed.] My ears deceive! For God's sake
mercy show.

Maude. Nay more! If you or your presuming son,
A living menace to my Henry's rights,
Shall dare to linger in our country's bounds
After to-morrow's sun hath sunk to rest
Your lives shall forfeit prove unto the crown.
[*Maud of Boulogne staggers and faints. Stephen
snaps chain and rushes to her. He is seized.*]

Maude. Hence with him to the tow'r.

Glou. [Pleading.] A little mercy
Could'st thou 'ford to show—

King Stephen

TABLEAU IV

Maude. Brother, enough, I say
Thou dost presume. Am I not Queen?

Ches. [Exultantly.] Thou art
In very sooth. Long live the Queen!

Step. Ha! ha!
Come dastards, who for gold sold out your chief,
Ope wide your coward throats. The King's no
more.
Long live the Queen!

Omnes. [Sullenly.] Long live the Queen!

TABLEAU V

Outside the Gates of Winchester.

Enter De Kaims.

Ches. What news is stirring at the outer post?

De K. Naught favorable, my Lord. Hot from the front
A trusty messenger has but arrived
Pregnant with tidings of the most dread mishap.
The stalwart en'my in its fierce advance
Joined with our hosts, who met their desperate
clash;
But reckoning made, this sad result was known,
Robert of Gloucester was a prisoner ta'en.

Ches. Gloucester?

De K. Aye, the impeccable glory
Of our noble cause is humbled in the dust.

Ches. Glouc'ster a prisoner. A short time since
And my ambitious soul had flamed with joy
At this inglor'ous news. But that's now past.
His daring valor and his puissant name
Were all too needed in our fading cause.
Who was the agent in his compassing?

De K. 'Twas Stephen's brother did effect his fall,
The prelate militant of Winchester.

Ches. Would that some other hand had brought it 'bout.
The irony of fate marks his undoing.
No weather cock responds to lulling breeze

With gentler grace than this same Winchester
Yields to soft airs that whisper of prefer.
Tho' fixed and bound by ev'ry tie of blood
Strongly and oft he flouted Stephen's claim.
Maude's cause he 'spoused and to her banner
brought

The prestige of his churchly rank and state.
Now veers he round, and breasts him to the front
In swelling columns of opposing foes
To batter down the hopes he once called his.
But are they checked, who would assail this town?

De K. I'm so advised. Our leader's loss at first
Spread consternation in the lines.
A rout looked imminent. The worst was feared.
But Gloucester's capture worked so on their shame,
In which each soldier seemed to share a part,
That, like the snarling tiger drove to bay,
Up and anon they rushed and stayed the foe
In his victorious and mad advance.
No vantage in the main has either gained;
And so like breathéd animals they rest
Waiting the call to further bout at arms.

Ches. But menaced is the safety of our Queen.
The line is thin that shields her from these wolves.
Some measures must we now devise lest she
A victim fall to Gloucester's fate.
Who's he who cometh here so scant in wind,
That utterance scarce can give he to his words?

Enter Sir Roland

Sir Rol. My noble lord! I've spurred me from the front.
Disaster's close at hand. Our ranks give way

And Winchester is but a league removed.
Look to the Queen. I bleed in her behalf.

De K. Wounded, Sir Roland?

Sir R. A scratch perhaps, no more.

The Queen! look to her, th' occasion's desp'rate.

Enter Queen Maude.

Maude. Aye, say you well, most desperate indeed.
See with what hollow mock'ry shines the sun,
Shines when we all are wrapped in glowering gloom.
Nor all its glist'ning grandeur can dart forth
A shaft to pierce this black investiture
Of pending grief that grips us in her pall.
Right nobly well in our behalf ye've fought
And suffered, bled, while fallen too have some.
For these our thanks, naught else remains to give.
Therefore, while yet is time, make peace with those
On whose gay pennons wingéd vict'ry sits.
Ye're all released. Allegiance to exact
At such a time were sounding mockery.
Revival is in vain, the cause is crushed.
My prayers attend ye. Fare you well and leave
Me to my fate.

De K. Not so! While yet a drop
Of blood speeds thro' my veins, by Heav'ns, 'tis
yours,
Most gracious Queen. I ask no greater boon
Than that my life be ended in thy cause.

Ches. You may not, Sovereign, at this stage clip off
Responsibility that binds ye round.
A horrid blow's been struck in Gloucester's loss;

And for it must we pay a heavy price.
But we've a ransom they cannot refuse.
Stephen, we'll yield them for the valiant Duke.
Nor gall nor wormwood could embitter more
Than does the costliness of this exchange.
But with the leaders ranged on either side
We'll fight once more till death stays one or both.

Maude. Spoke like the gallant champion that thou art.
And yet, what reck's it, sooth, if agony
Prolongèd is? With carriage high I've played
The part of Queen. Now faints my wearied soul.
With English blood fair England's meads are
'plashed.

Her restful green no longer soothes the eye
But flaunting red bursts forth on ev'ry side
A hid'ous witness to this fearful strife.
We'll end it here. Mine is a waning life;
Better it sink into a chastening grave
Than be the beacon to still bloodier deeds.

De K. But Henry?

Ches. Aye; thy son? . What of his claims?
Would you, his mother, calmly yield his rights?
See Stephen 'stablished on a throne usurped?
'Tis not the Empress Maude acquits such wrong.
Rouse! rouse! My Queen, remember who thou art.
Blood of thy father, Henry, sure must pump
Reviving courage to that yielding heart?
You must, you shall, our leader yet remain.

Maude. Chester, ye've stirred the lioness once more.
Till hell shall gape, I'll battle for my cub.
Advise—I'm in your hands.

Ches. Once more the Queen!

Prepare you, then, I beg, for instant flight.
Loyal Oxford offers you a strong retreat.
Meanwhile we'll struggle with these yelping wolves.
De Kaims shall shield you on your journey hence.

De K. My life is consecrate to this great trust.

Ches. We know the trust will be right well fulfilled;
And may your goodly person freely share
In those rewards, which grateful hearts will 'stow,
When right comes to its own. De Kaims, farewell!
And Heaven defend our noble Queen!

De K. Farewell— [Exit De Kaims.

Sir R. Look! look! my lord! If eyes deceive me not
See where our vanguard enters into parle
With him who bears our foeman's hated arms?

Ches. A truce?

Sir R. 'Twould seem as such. What may it mean?
Here comes a messenger who'll tell us all.

Enter Heathe.

Heathe. My lord of Chester, from th' enemy's camp
An emissary doth attend your Grace.
He comes from Winchester and begs that you
Will give him speedy audience,
Looking to th' exchange of Gloucester for the King.

Sir R. Alone?

Heathe. Alone.

Ches. Let him have conduct here [Exit Heathe.
They know affairs have struck a mighty halt,
And fain would press the vantage quickly home.

We'll temporize. The Queen must quit her hence,
Else would their purposed bargain 'vail us naught.

Enter De Redvers.

De Red. Chester!

Ches. De Redvers?

De Red. Aye, Earl Baldwin he.

Time is so precious, that I will not veil
My weighty object in superfluous words.
You know my presence. Stephen still in chains
Forged by the hate of reigning Maude is bound.
Gloucester, your sturdy prop, is now the prize
Of Winchester's victorious 'complishment.
I am commissioned by that prelate chief
To treat with you for their exchange. Stephen we
know
Is vilely 'prisoned in these hereabouts.
If in this square, within an hour's time,
Thou wilt produce our monarch safe, unharmed,
We, on our part, to you 'll deliver up
Gloucester in e'en the selfsame shape.

Ches. Agreed.

And till the leaders of their several sides
Are yielded back let dove-like peace stretch out
Her sheltering wings and keep us neath their shade.

De Red. Amen to that good wish. We'll play you fair.
We can expect no less from Englishmen.

[Exit De Redvers.]

Ches. *[To Sir Hil.]* To those who have the rebel in
their keep
This signet bear, they'll honor it; and see

The King is brought here with your best dispatch.
[Exit Sir Hildebrand.]

Sir Roland, quick within, and learn if Maude
Is started on her Oxford way. Th' exchange
Will soon be brought about. All but too brief
Will be the time consumed. At end of truce
Danger again will hunt her queenly self.

[Exit Sir Roland.]

Thus woe succeeds on woe with hid'ous speed.
Nor is it given to the mind of man
To solve the myst'ries of relentless fate.
We can but live our parts as best we may—
The final aspect Heaven rules.

Enter De Redvers.

De Red. Obedient to our word we here appear.
Worn by the fierce arbitrament of blows
And battered by chagrin; but at our hands
Cared for as fits the man and mighty foe,
We Gloucester yield to you. Where is the King?

Ches. Your patience we must crave a brief time more.
They're on the way who have him in their charge.
Our pledge is giv'n.

De Red. And well is it received.
Strike off the bonds that hold in 'prisoning check
Th' imperious spirit of our valiant foe.
Thus Gloucester to thy own art thou restored
While we with patience, in most vile control,
Await our King.

Glou. Chester, it was a more
Than kindly deed that moved you to this end.

We've differed oft in policy of state
And many times we've clashed. No rivals now
Save in the best that we for her can do.
That you have saved my life makes it but yours.
So 'tis, except I beg it may be spent
And ended, too, in service to our lady.
[*Aside.*] Is she safe?

Ches. If hope and prayer can make her so,
She is. [*Aloud.*] Here Stephen comes.

Enter King Stephen.

De Red. and followers. All hail the King!
Stephen! Stephen! Stephen!

Step. Friends—most faithful brothers all
I take ye to my heart—aye, to my heart
Of hearts. Ye've staid me well in parlous days.
For all that thou hast done in my behalf,
Has kept the fluttering spark of hope alive
Within my breast. Now bursts it forth in mighty
Flame and like a beacon shall it lead you on
To glorious vict'ry or immortal death.
Gloucester, thou, too, hast known the ignominy
That comes when pride is toppled from her throne.
The loyalty thy men have shown to you
Will spur thee on. What these for me have done
I'll ne'er forget. And so by fate's decree
These daring souls—must for their faith—perhaps,
Yield up their lives till, b'yond peradventure
Of a doubt supremacy on either
Thee or me is firmly fixed.

Glou. The cleavage
Thou hast clearly drawn. If England is to live
These interne wars must to an end be brought.

Step. Then come you on. Prepare you for the worst.
We'll fight it out. Once more the die is cast.
'Tis either Stephen or forever Maude.

Enter Archbishop of Canterbury.

Cant. For England's peace would that high Heaven
decreed
Ye neither had been born.

Step. Canterbury?

Cant. Aye, the helpless shepherd of a scattered flock.
And who are ye that do presume to mar
That blessed peace that God exacts from all?
Dost think that either—for that noble blood
Courses within your veins, has gained the right
To rudely set aside sweet nature's laws
And those of nature's God? Who art thou, Stephen,
And who art thou, that doth 'present the Queen
To dare presume to shed or spill one drop
Of English blood, to devastate this land
With fire and sword, to dare bring sorrow into
Joyous homes—that worldly pomp shall flower?
Put up your swords! down on your knees and pray
The God thou 'st wronged may you some mercy
show.

Step. God knows! and bitter may he judge poor me,
If that I speak not fair. There is not one
Abhors this bloody state, sweet Canterbury,

A tittle more than does the King. But peace,
Abiding peace will never reign till fought
And settled is this sovereign claim.

Glow. None bows
With greater grace unto the convict of
Your priestly words than here do I—
But as the leader of Plantagenet's house
I can but echo all that Stephen's said.
Slumbers the sullen fire of discontent
Throughout the land, and blood alone will quench.

Cant. Proud stubborn hearts I see ye are resolved.
For what ye've done and what ye will to do,
Your sins be on your sullen heads. But when
That day of heavy reckoning is met
May He, to you that mercy show, which, you
Your country have denied.

Sounds of an approaching funeral.

De Red. My lord of Chester, what's this that exit seeks
from siegèd walls? our terms of truce permit no
issuance.

Ches. I know not what it means! Explain, De Kaims!

De K. We pay but tribute to the honored dead.
That fem'ine heart that with a manly strength
Did buffet well th' adversities of fate
Has ceased to beat. The Queen, brave Maude is
dead!

Omnes. Dead! th' Empress Maude?

De K. See where she silent lies in mortal clay.

Her struggles, hopes are ended, sealed and cased.

Glou. Dead! dead! How came this tragic end about?

De K. [*Aside.*] A ruse! a ruse!

Glou. [*Whispers.*] A ruse?

De K. [*Aside.*] Be wary and betray us not.

Step. Let sovereign honors publicly be paid
To Henry's mighty child. Till funeral
Rites be fittingly performed; we'll call a halt,
And seal our ears to war's insistent plea.

Cant. The voice of Heav'n hath spoke and peace again
comes tardy forth.

Glou. Nay, urge you on too fast.
Though Maude be dead Plantagenet's star still
shines
In him, her son! Henry! Our swords are his!

Step. And ours shall clash with yours. My life may
soon
Be rounded out, but I, too, have a son,
Eustace, the hope and joy of Blois.

Step's followers. For him we'll die!
Both sides show disposition to fight.

Cant. In presence of the dead put up your swords.
[*Body is carried out preceded by the Archbishop
reciting:*

*Requiem æternam, dona eis Domine
Et lux perpetua luceat eis.*

TABLEAU VI

Outside the Castle at Oxford. A deep snow has fallen.

Shepherd, a soldier paces up and down.

Shep. Who goes there?

Gorse [*Entering.*] Friend of the King, who respite brings.

To your most tedious watch.

Shep. Aye, so it is.
Eight hours now I've told this straightened path
Where nothing is but solitude and cold.
Right glad am I to hear a kindred voice.
I hope it carries words of wholesome cheer?

Gorse. Would that it might, yet nothing is, that brings
Suggestion of a speedy close, to this
Long drawn out siege.

Shep. A plague upon them both.
Yet, if you'd weigh it well, a toss of coin
Would settle who fares worst. Within these walls
They starve. Without we freeze. 'Tis bitter cold.

Gorse. Yet colder 'tis within the hearts of those,
Who forced by circumstance wage out this fight.
Once mine did warm and glow in Stephen's cause;
'Twas frozen long time since. When will it end?

Shep. Never till pride, like us, is firmly gripped
Within an icy grasp. Give you good den
Brave sir, I'm off to warm this chill from out my
bones.

Gorse. Gives yonder castle any signs of life?

Shep. None that I've seen or heard. Methinks the rats
Are feasting proud off frozen flesh. Good night,
A quiet watch. [Exit *Shepherd*.]

Gorse. Good night! Now must I tramp,
To sullen measure of a bittered soul.
God! If they only would burst forth and fight.
Alone I'd meet them all with cheerful front,
And either conquer by my towering hate
Or meet a fate that for me, cannot come too soon.
Who ventures here? [Enter *King Stephen*.]

Step. One friendly to the cause,
A Knight whose privilege and boast it is,
To fight beneath the banner of the King.

Gorse. Your pride is easy puffed,
If that you vouch that same a privilege.
I'd sell my honor for a pound of peat,
And call him blessed who'd give me sleep
In change for this cold watch.

Step. Sirrah, beware.
Words such as these have dangerous sound and
ring.
The King has little use for luke warm friends.
Best keep within, well hid, such treach'rous thoughts
Else might his royal wrath, you quick draw down.

Gorse. I'd speak as free to him as speak I you.
Better he learn, before it be too late,
That fierce dissension stalks within his ranks.

Step. Dissension! Have care! Dissension say'st thou?

Gorse. Aye, bred by hunger out of fearful cold.
Thinkst thou a sense of justice fills the belly;
That righteousness of cause will keep you warm?
Back to him quick, if that you love him well
And paint the picture as it really is.
Strip off all shams, and ope his kingly eye,
To suff'rings so intense, that lest the issue
Speedily be closed, all of his gallant 'ray
Of knightly arms will prove but will o' wisps.

Step. But we, at least, who guard our pent in foe
Are better armed to fight the fell despair?
Suffer we must, that's clear, but who does not
In fighting upward onward to the light.
Think of the en'my closed in by yonder walls.
Daily their sustenance grows less, and less.
Each day the strength they have yields bit by bit
To rav'ning hunger and compelling thirst.
Surrender soon they must. And shall we then,
E'en on the very brink of our success,
Permit our pers'nal woes to sap our strength?

Gorse. If that thou wert the very King himself
Thou couldst not argue with a sweeter breath.
Thy logic hath a pithy poignant ring,
But what is logic to a starvèd soul?
I'd joy with e'en the best when to the front,
Pressed his resistless ranks, did I not know

They trampled out the life that nature gave.
I'd shout to see him move with steady step
Toward the goal of his ambitious aim;
If that heartrending cries of tortured wife
And sickly hungered brats choked not my throat.
Nay! nay! my gallant sir, this civic strife,
Is food for titled lords; for husbandmen
And they that love their homes 'tis drawn out hell.

Step. What you have said doth echo with the truth.
To England's wail for peace our ears we've stopped.
Her strength we've sapped and if we take not care;
But push to further lengths we'll kill that pride
That makes her fear and envy of the world.
I thank thee soldier for thy honest thought,
It shall not 'scape the King. Good night.

Gorse. Good night; and sith to thy call thou hast the
kingly ear
Give it for me a rare and whole souled twist.

Step. Thou saucy knave! 'Tis tweaked.
[*King Stephen retires up.*]

Enter De Redvers.

De Red. Hast seen the King?

Gorse. The King, my noble Earl? I've seen no man
Save him whose watch I took. Stay: one proud
Knight
Whose boast it was that ear of majesty
Would ever lend when he saw fit to speak.

De Red. [*Aside.*] It is the King. [*Aloud.*] Whence went this boasting Knight?

Gorse. There! see where his shape looms 'gainst the glow'ring sky.

[*De Redvers moves on*] The King! [*Laughs.*]
I always knew this clacking tongue
Rebellious adjunct soon would bring me grief.
A costly jest. Naught but a stretchèd neck,
Will pay for that same tweak.

Enter Queen Maud of Blois.

Maud. We seek the King.

Gorse. See where he hither comes.

The Earl of Baldwin keeps him company.

King Stephen and De Redvers advance.

Step. He's told me naught. Save that your royal Presence urgent is. Oh! speak, my Queen!

Maud. As thou lov'st me, Stephen, fold me I beg unto thy generous heart.

Step. Thy silence to me is more frightful far
Than words that bellow forth arriving doom.
I prithee speak. What is't so fearful love
That to thy lord thou canst not give it voice?
If in thy turn you hold me dear, sweet Maud,
Speak, ere suspense doth crack my fearful brain.

Maud. I come, a messenger, of hid'ous woe.

Step. Nay, nay, not so!

Maud. You guess the worst—

Step. Eustace—
Our son—

Maud. Is dead.

De Red. and Gorse. Dead! [*Whisper.*] Dead?

Step. Draw all apart,
We'd nurse this grief alone, I will not rack
Your soul, sweet dear, nor ope' your bleeding wound
With quest of sad or harrowing detail.
The worst is known. Our boy is dead. It was
As much for him as was for me, you bore
The horrors of this drawn out war,
Coped with the misery of constant fear
And brought sweet cheer, when hope seemed on
the ebb.
You've played a soldier's part; the battle's lost
And goodly have you earned both peace and rest.
In Eustace's death we'll sheathe our grasping
swords.
No more these urgent arms shall draw the blade,
Their office shall give o'er to gentler moods. [*Em-
braces her.*]

Maud. If that a balm could heal a mother's loss
Your kindly words would medicine my grief.
Too fresh it is, to yield its poignancy,
Still from my soul, I yield thee hearty thanks,
And whatsoe'er shall be your royal will,
My gladsome duty to you I commend.

Step. Though fate has dealt us this most bitter blow
I'll not allow the cause of all our wrongs

To 'scape unscathed. Rebellious Maude shall pay.
This siege shall not be raised. I take my oath.
Come in, dear heart, you shiver with the cold.

[*Exeunt Stephen and Queen Maude.*]

Gorse. Poor man! Though King, still nothing but a
man.

With right, impartial biting sorrow sits
Upon the proudest head that wears a crown
E'en as it tops the meanest yokel's skull.
Home to his royal heart is brought the truth
That death and desolation spare no rank.
Oft when our troubles seem beyond endure,
Sweet hope blooms forth and sheds a radiant calm.
Let's trust in kingly woe fair England's peace
May rise to lofty heights. But gentle thoughts
Will never stir and free half frozen blood.
Days, weeks and months have waned since queenly
Maude

Took refuge safe, behind those shelt'ring walls.
On such a night escape will ne'er appeal.
Better I warm myself beside yon glow
Than frigid duty turn me icicle.
The chance I'll take.

[*Exit Gorse.*]

During this speech it has begun to snow. After his exit there is a brief pause; then a small door in wall opens and De Kaims appears, followed by Gloucester, Chester and Queen Maude.

De Kaims. Look where the frozen watch
Has ta'en him hence. But rest you here a while
Till see I that your 'scape is free and clear.

[*Advances and returns.*]

Naught stirs and in the cloak of falling snow,
Which yields a silence deep and all profound,
We'll wrap ourselves and quiet steal away.

Glou. Most gracious Queen, put on your whitened sheet.

Maude. A winding sheet methinks thou should'st have said.

Ches. You all too fearful grow. Nature herself,
A friend, doth smile upon our 'genious ruse.
Her snowy flakes do lend to our resolve
And in their close and vapping descent,
Screened as we several are in perfect white,
We'll blend into the scene and so escape
The hellish scrutiny of Stephen's guards.
Rest thou upon my arm.

Glou. And on this side.
Let me help bear you up. 'Rouse, mighty Queen,
Awake! Security is close at hand.

De K. In words no further waste this precious time.
Proceed ye on. I'll follow in the rear.
One life at least shall pay a forfeit dread
Before these hell hounds push upon your scent.

[Gloucester, Chester and Queen Maude proceed softly and slowly. Momentary halts of alarm. De Kaims with drawn sword backs after them hesitatingly. As they nearly approach the exit the moon shines out revealing them in outline. It closes in and they disappear in the shadow. A moment's silence and Gorse enters. As he paces the ground the moon again breaks forth and he slowly chants: "Twelve o'clock and all is well."

TABLEAU VII

Hall in the Castle.

De Redvers entering.

De Red. It is an augury of bright import
That, once more, shines the sun. For near a month
Her face she's firm and resolutely hid,
Now beams she forth, on this, the day of days
When warring factions 'gree to bury deep
Their long time hate. From out that grave may
 sheaves
Of loving plenty shoot and fill the garners
Of our glorious land with peace, content and rest.
[Exit De Redvers.]

Enter Gorse and Heathe, meeting.

Gorse. Well met, old friend, upon thy cheery face
I've not set eyes since last on Lincoln's field
We fell afoul. That noisy scar athwart
My chap is proof how well you wield a pike.

Heathe. I, too, a record bear of that same day
Its grisly features ne'er will be forgot.
For little far behind in skill wert thou.
That into twain you clove me not was e'en
Because my burnished helmet glanced your blow.
Upon my skull the token yet remains
And aches me still on rainy days.

Gorse.

Say'st so,

Well all's forgot. Come thou with me apart,
I know that cheerful one, who guards the ale,
That later will pour forth in golden gush.
Time by the forelock let us nimbly pluck
And down a beaker to these new found joys.

Heathe. Foe that once was, friend, welcome now that is.

Thy keen suggestion aggravates my thirst.
Lead thou where varied nectars flow and may
Its source retiring ebb ne'er know. [*They exeunt.*]

Enter De Kaims and Elfrida.

Elf. Methinks thy mother must give thanks and say
The Heavens be praised, "my son I see once more."

De K. If that it be you share not in that joy,
There is no Heaven for me.

Elf. And in that Heav'n,
A disembodied spirit must I stalk about?
May not this fleshy mould rejoice that war
A gallant knight has spared?

De K. If in that phrase
You 'clude my humble self, receive my thanks.
But have I 'scaped the archery of foes
Only to fall, by cupid's shafts impaled?
His subtle skill is not for me to cope.
When glorious peace trumped out her glad report
I cast my armor side. Naked I stood
In all my helplessness, there stand I still.
Before the blazonry of thy bright eyes
A martial spirit staggers and grows faint.
That flute like voice of thine, frights me, the more,

Ten thousand times, than cries from battle hoarse,
This velvet hand sends swift and fierce alarm
A coursing down my spine. No mailed fist
Could do as much. Oh, smile, and I take heart.
Smile and I flourish like the bay tree green.

Elf. And shall I deign to smile
On him, who trait'rously opposed my King?

De K. Remember 'twas for thy glorious sex
I did oppose. In woman's cause did I
Unsheathe my sword. Bears that no weight with
thee,
Who art the very Queen of womankind?

Elf. Out of that mouth [*aside*] and by my faith it is
A pretty one [*aloud*] confess; my jealousy
You only fan to flame. You loved the Queen
Far better than poor me. Else had you fought
Where my best hopes went out.

De K. Relentless one!
How can I fence against thy nimble wit?
Had I but known my all was so at stake,
The King might hang for all I'd wage in his
Behalf. Oh, take me to thy favor. Wipe
Out the past from mem'ry's slate and enter
There this solemn truth, I love thee. If that
This make no echo in your heart, then let me
Pass and find a grave to hide me and my woe.

Elf. Too many graves have now been filled. I could
Not bear fierce Heaven's frown had I a part,
In such unholy task. Therefore I yield.

[*They exeunt.*]

Enter Queen Maude, Chester and Prince Henry.

Maude. Chester! since Robert's death my prop and stay
Support us yet through this exacting scene.
Still must we yield what is our justly due?

Ches. To later joy it with untroubled pomp.

Prince H. I'm young, dear Mother, and can 'ford to
wait;

Nor shall exacting time rob you of part
In those brave scenes when I, the scion of
Plantagenet take up the English rule.

The honor's great that doth await your son,
But nothing would it vaunt if from the Councils
Of that Royal state your splendid force
Which ever with unfalt'ring zeal hath waged
In my behalf were absent but a space.
Let England curse me, as an ingrate son,
If to thy wisdom, I e'er recreant prove.

Maude. Not as a Queen but as a Mother now
I speak. From since the time that thou wert child
I've felt the grasp and purpose of thy self.
Blood royal hast thou ever proved and so
Fought I, that all thy winning grace, thy skill
Of mind and dauntless heart should have a part
In framing England's weal. God bless the day
That thou wert born to glad a Mother's heart.

Ches. And in the years to come, a grateful people,
Shall rise up and shout: God bless the day Maude
Gave us such a King!

Prince H. Let's in, to learn
The parts that ceremony bids us play.

[*They exeunt.*]

Enter Sir Rufus and Sir Roland.

Sir Ruf. 'Tis then agreed this hideous strife is o'er
And for the 'mainder of his earthly life
Stephen shall hold the throne in peace?

Sir Rol. E'en so;
And at his death succession then attains
To Henry, who'll be second of that name.

Sir Ruf. And who hath wrought this miracle of peace?
My wounds for months have kept me in the dark.

Sir Rol. The agéd Canterbury brought it 'bout.
In cause of peace he worked, a fertile field.
Of fighting e'en the lustiest cried enough.
And so assembled all are we to-day,
To see this pact delivered, signed and sealed.

Sir Ruf. I do rejoice I've lived to share such joy.
[*They exeunt.*]

Enter Maud of Boulogne and King Stephen.

Maud. It glads me well to see a gentle smile
Steal once again o'er lineaments so dear.
May sorry fate ne'er purse that brow again
But may it ever light with victory's trump
And hope, do I, proud triumph's light may flame,
Those royal eyes with such a scorching blast
That thoughts 'gainst thee shall shrivel at their
glare.

Once more the crown sets firmly on thy head.
Won by the majesty of loyal arms,
It fits thee well, rejoice! the day is ours!

Step. Still does the triumph live only to die!
Keen disappointment, parent of despair
Cloaks all within its comprehensive pall.
When from this tired frame proud life shall yield
Mark well! The sun of Blois forever sets.
What for our land it may be that I make
Of helpful good cannot be handed down,
The fountain head of our proud house is dry;
It sapped and wasted when our Eustace died.

Maud. Bitter a blow to me as 'twas to you.
But I'll not yield me to this dread despair.
Like silver dove from out the dark'ning gloom
On pinions moved by rare and pure delight
His soul soared free into the realms aloft,
Regions of peace and everlasting love.
Thou canst not call him back, nor should you try
For mortal joy, that might enhance your days.
Endure the message that high Heav'n hath sent
And in *her* son, find one to soothe our loss.

Step. Friend, comrade wife, uplifter of my strength
I do accept thy charge. This bleeding heart
Her wounds shall close knit up and in that state
My plenty love shall pour on Henry's head.
[*They exeunt.*]

Enter Gorse and Heathe.

Gorse. We've but returned in time. See, where they
form

The ceremony straightway will begin.

Heathe. Pray Heav'n they make it brief. On 'casions
such

Some spirit, fused with import of the scene,
Grows eloquent, and mindless of the feast
That waits us all, shoots forth his plenteous words
In such relentless flow, e'en like a gun
Well served by handy men, that steaming joints
Grow cold, and flat becomes the cheering ale.

Enter Omnes.

Cant. O'er this assemblage, in high Heav'n's name
Called here to bring about a truce to war
May Gracious God pour forth His healing grace.
[All seat themselves.]

Omnes. Amen.

Cant. The panoply of war is cased
In peace. Pikes, swords and shields are now hung
up
Screened in and hid by nature's gentle gifts.
The terms agreed, there nothing yet remains
But that the principals shall seal their names
To pact of lasting amity. Proceed!

Maude. For me, who as the heir of Henry First
Did wield the sceptre as a legal right;
And for my son, who follows in my steps
I here renounce the crown while Stephen lives.
And may this act to England prove a boon.
Thus do I fix my name. *[She signs.]*

Prince H. To what's been said, I gladly do assent
And here subscribe I with a willing hand
My life and my allegiance bold to him,
King Stephen, may his reign be long.
[He signs.]

Omnes. The King! the King!

Step. The gracious words that have attuned my ear
Like heavenly music move my soul to tears.
From deep down in my heart I thank ye all
And with God's help I'll yield ye your desert.
There is my pledge [*he signs*] [*to his wife*]. Dear
one. Ascend we up. [*They mount the throne. To*
Henry.] And thou my heir, in very truth my son
Here 'pon my right. [*Cheers.*] Thou'lt not have
long to wait.

Cant. Where all's rejoicement let us not forget
To yield our thanks to God, our King above
Within those walls all hallowed to His use.
We'll voice His praise and laud His Holy Name.

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